

Paul Andrew Vitale



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‘You sign on this mission. It’s a calling, and you have to see it through.’

Positively motivating others is more than just a line of work for Paul Vitale. He sincerely believes in his message of hope and encouragement.

RON WOLFE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Paul Vitale has the perfect name for a guy whose job is to bring vitality, whose business is called Vital Communications Inc., and whose message is hope for the new year. “If you have the ambition to do something,” he says, “whatever it is, now is the time.” Vitale talks this way for a living. Take his advice, and he’ll promise at least one result: “You won’t have to look back and say, ‘What if?’” And things might turn out even better than you imagine. Case in point: this Arkansas guy with the ambition to stand up and motivate people. He listened to Paul Vitale, ignoring every other voice that told him to settle for a steady paycheck. He built his career out of natural energy, a quick smile, a sharp wardrobe, a purposeful stride, a big message — and a few quiet secrets. “I am a true Arkansan,” Vitale says. “I not only get to deliver a message of hope and encouragement, but also I get to let people know about the treasures we have right here in Arkansas.” He talks this way to about 100 audiences a year, thousands of people — at school assemblies, business conventions, sales meetings, anywhere people need a lift. Based in Little Rock, he travels the state, the nation and abroad as far away as Hong Kong,

ever-going, a professional motivator. People see him in action on YouTube and find his excited voice translated to print in the books he writes, most recently in this year’s *Sell With Confidence: Unlock Your Potential*, published by Vital Communications. He sounds the same, too, at Starbucks in the Heights in Little Rock. It’s not the caffeine talking. Vitale, 37, declines coffee. Resolving to experience more the healthful benefits of plain water in the new year, he treats himself, right now, to hot chocolate. Being a motivator, he says, “you’re always looking for ways to stay motivated yourself.” But for him, it’s not an attitude — he sees it as a job requirement the same as he and every other Pittsburgh Steelers fan knows the quarterback throws the ball. “You sign on this mission,” he says. “It’s a calling, and you have to see it through.” Vitale’s animated voice of enthusiasm tempts the coffee shop’s other customers to glance his way, listening behind him. Few would be surprised to learn he played the snare drum in high school. But here’s the rest of the story: He also made the football team in hometown Russellville and managed to play both — drums in the concert band as well as wide receiver on the field.

“I never marched,” he says, as if anyone might do twice as much if only they quit trying to keep step in a long tromp to frustration. March to your own beat, is the message. “Follow your vision.” Vitale quit a young career in public relations and marketing and took a chance on his ability to give people a boost. He understands that some don’t want to listen. “I respect that.” Skeptical faces dare him to make a difference — change a mind. “Come and live my life,” people tell him. See how hard it is to feel motivated, they say, for the person who isn’t so young, so lean, broad-shouldered, athletic-looking (the result of Vitale’s morning runs and jump-rope workouts), or so carefully dressed. “Be Aware of Your Appearance” is a chapter in Vitale’s *Sell With Confidence* — a call for shoe polish and clean fingernails. His shirt is so white, so crisp, it all but crackles. “A lot of people didn’t get up this morning,” he counters, “but we have.” First blink of the new day — first step in the new year — and already, in Vitale’s view, a person has upset the odds against him. Anything is possible. He tells how he knows. In third grade, he was diagnosed with a learn- See **VITALE**, Page 8D

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 ing disability. The condition is hard to spell, hard to say, and so he has written it down to be sure he tells it right: *phonemic awareness difficulty*, trouble recognizing vowel sounds.

His mother, a school teacher, made sure he received the years of tutoring it took for him to read and write, and to pronounce words correctly. By eighth grade, he announced his ambition: to be a professional speaker.

Vitale often cites personal experiences to illustrate his points. This one, not so much. The story sounds too improbable — the chances of a boy who stumbles over words being able to speak for a living.

“I’m going to be a motivational speaker?” he says with a laugh at the seeming whopper. “Are you kidding me?”

Even now, the old condition troubles him once in a while.

“I’m very aware of what I say,” Vitale explains. “I don’t want to pull out a word I can’t enunciate.”

Resolution: Learn a new word every day.

In writing, the same awareness pares his style to a simplicity of short sentences and plainly stated ideas. “Perception is reality” ... “Sharpen your focus” ... three words, the same as his favorite quote: *“Keep it simple.”*

“QUOTE”

Vitale collects inspirational quotes.

His first book, *Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life?* (1998), is based on the advice he collected from hundreds of sources; and his second, *Pass It On: Quotations for All Generations* (2002), is 128 pages, 365 quotes of advice and encouragement.

“Quotes are meant to be passed on,” he writes.

Repeated, remembered, secreted in a wallet, tucked in a lunch bag, pinned to the bulletin board, stuck to the refrigerator, quotes make the day. One thing that motivates a motivator is hope that he might be quoted.

“It’s not whether you get knocked down, it’s whether you get up.” — Football Coach Vince Lombardi, quoted in Paul Vitale’s *Pass It On*

Are You Puzzled by the Puzzle of Life? describes another childhood experience that shaped him, that “introduced me to the wonderful feeling of importance.”

The thrill of watching a Pittsburgh Pirates game, his first professional baseball game, gave way to “a white blur headed my way.” The foul ball struck him in the chest, landing 10-year-old Paul in the Pittsburgh stadium’s emergency room for X-rays.

Taped for three bruised ribs, he returned to watch the rest of the game. But the game stopped, and the crowd stood and cheered for him. Besides, he got to keep the ball.

“I got the nurse to sign it,” he says.

Everyone should feel so special, Vitale says, and he realized “one of my purposes in life” was to make other people happy.

J Courson, associate dean of students at Southern Arkansas University in Magnolia, was among the first to book Vitale for a speech, a talk to resident assistants on the campus.

“Enthusiastic, friendly, inspiring ... Naturally, he was a huge success,” Courson relates. “Paul has continued to speak on our campus each fall for the past 15 years.”

“It’s hard to beat a person who never gives up.” — Yankees star hitter Babe Ruth in *Pass It On*.

Vitale graduated from the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, in 1995, with a degree in mass communication that landed him a job at Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods advertising agency in Little Rock.

“I learned a lot about this great state of ours [from tourism accounts], and how to treat people, and how to do business,” Vitale says.

He wrote his first book on the side, prompted by his older brother Matt’s question, “What does it take to be successful?”

Vitale concedes that at age 26 the main thing he knew



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“I don’t have to have quiet to write. I look at the colors, the different titles, and words pop out at me.”

SELF PORTRAIT

Paul Vitale

■ **DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH** April 12, 1972, in Russellville.

■ **IF I HADN’T BECOME A MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER, I WOULD HAVE BEEN** Definitely something in marketing, probably for a professional football team.

■ **ONE THING SUCCESS HAS TAUGHT ME IS** Whatever your talents are, you have the chance to use them to help other people.

■ **ONE THING I’VE LEARNED FROM FAILURE IS** Humility is a great lesson.

■ **MY FAVORITE THING TO WEAR IS** I work out a lot, so — workout clothes.

■ **ONE THING THAT ALWAYS CHEERS ME UP IS** I love to write and receive letters.

■ **THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH (BESIDES DISNEYLAND) IS** The White River. Getting to fish and float down the river, that’s a happy place for a person like me.

■ **MY FAVORITE SUPERHERO IS** Superman — he always tries to right the wrong.

■ **MY REAL-LIFE HEROES ARE** My parents (Lou and Carole Vitale of Russellville) — I credit them with so much.

■ **IF I COULD BOTTLE ENTHUSIASM, I WOULD SELL IT BY THE BRAND NAME OF** Invigorating.

■ **A WORD TO SUM ME UP** Optimistic.

Vitale proposed to his wife, Jessica, not only in front of her, but also in front of his parents on a family trip to visit relatives in Pittsburgh, and his

audience, a crowd of women in a weight-loss program in Atlanta.

“They loved it,” Vitale’s mother, Carole Vitale, says. “They thought it was the most

romantic thing they’d ever seen.” And after a gulp of surprise, and a clutch of fear that her son might have taken too great a risk, “it went off well,” she says. He’d finally “found the lid to his pot.”

Vitale’s wife of nearly three years, Jessica, tells how they met at the post office.

“We had known each other before,” she says, business acquaintances, but the chance encounter sparked a dating relationship.

“We’re both fairly positive personalities,” she says, “and I think that was the big attraction.”

Dating, she imagined “he doesn’t have any bad days.” Married, she concedes to having seen a few, but says her husband’s enthusiasm is basic nature.

“He’s a very happy guy, full of energy,” she says. “He loves to speak, loves to help people, and I think that’s what gives him his drive.”

“I help with accounting and proofreading,” she says, but Vitale credits his wife with much more.

“She’s not only my best friend,” he says, “she’s a huge support for what I do. She understands the ebb and flow of what I do as a public speaker, and that’s critical.”

Home from a speaking trip, “I might tell my wife I’m not going to talk a lot for the next few days,” he says. “I might sit and watch the fireplace, just

watch the fire glow.”

A favorite meal at home is spaghetti and sauce, an entree that places his wife’s cooking in direct competition with the Vitale family’s traditional, homemade Italian recipes.

“I don’t make it for his parents,” she says — yet.

“I have found enthusiasm for work to be the most priceless ingredient in any recipe for success.” — Hollywood mogul Samuel Goldwyn in *Pass It On*.

Vitale competes for attention against an industry of other speakers, other ideas, greater promises, motivational books, T-shirts and posters — and lately, a backlash against thinking the best can happen in today’s world of war, recession, gloom, good people out of work, illnesses that defy cure.

The Internet touts everything from prayer to hypnosis and feng shui as the ways to riches and happiness. Barbara Ehrenreich leads a charge against optimism in her new book, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (Metropolitan). Better to be “hacked to death by a madman,” she writes, than to go through bad times with a “sweet little smile.”

Vitale holds the middle ground — no insisting on a smile no matter what, no promises that wishing makes things happen (“You have to take action”), but he tells how he knows that positive energy works.

“I’ll say, ‘Give me an example of your best day,’” he says, “and people raise their hands. They’ll say the birth of a grandchild, a promotion in their careers, and you can feel the energy — actually feel it,” he says. “They’re smiling, laughing, and we know these things are positive to a person’s health.”

Ask about bad days, “and you can feel the energy — it drops,” he says. “Ask people how it feels to be around negative energy, they’ll say it drains, it brings me down.”

“We know good things happen to bad people, and bad things happen to good people,” Vitale says. “I believe it’s all in how you deal with the circumstance.”

Good times or bad, “my core message stays the same,” he says. “It sums up what I’m trying to accomplish.”

“There will always be those who face greater obstacles in life than others. When this occurs, we have the opportunity to look toward them, rather than away. That’s the value of humanity — reaching out to others when no one else will.” — Paul Vitale, not quoted in his book of quotes, but ready for the next opportunity.

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